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Conference Abstract

Current State of Collections Management Strategies, Standards and Procedures in the Entomology Department at the Durban Natural Science Museum, South Africa

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Abstract

The Durban Natural Science Museum (DNSM) is located in the city of Durban in KwaZulu-Natal province, South Africa. Its entomology collection is one of three main collections at the museum. The collection consists of 141,000 dried specimens and encompasses 25 of the 29 known insect orders. Most of the specimens originate from South Africa however there is also a small percentage which has international origins. Collection growth is perpetuated by field collection trips and donations.

In the recent past, DNSM was afforded the opportunity, through the South African National Research Foundation (NRF) via the Natural History Collections (NHC) Funding Instrument, to digitise insect type specimens and move the entomology research database from Microsoft Access to the web-based data management system, Specify 7. These developments have improved accessibility to the collection especially by those who do not have direct contact and access to the collection.

In preparation for the migration to Specify 7, the specimen data was cleaned and standardised by means of an open source online tool, *OpenRefine*. The tool enabled the

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analysis and correction of data using an automated process which allowed for maximum productivity. Henceforth, we will ensure that the errors encountered during the data cleaning process will not be repeated. This will be achieved by training data capturers on correct formatting standards and using pick lists in the new database management system to foster consistency.

On-going collections care is a core component of the DNSM, however a collections management policy is lacking and therefore such procedures differ somewhat across the three core departments. With regards to the entomology department, temperature and humidity monitoring efforts and mould prevention, detection and collection recovery occur regularly. Durban is a coastal city, and the characteristic high humidity is of great concern because it facilitates mould development on the specimens. Regular monitoring procedures mitigate such outbreaks.

The DNSM has joined South Africa's newly launched Natural Science Collections Facility (NSCF) which is a network of institutions which maintain zoological, botanical and paleontological collections. The NSCF, in consultation with institution representatives, has initiated the development of a collections management policy document which will be adopted by the DNSM as one of its sub-policies once it has been passed. The Durban Natural Science Museum will continue to strive for international best practises in collections management.

Keywords

entomology, collection, accessibility, database, monitoring

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